

5 We claim:

1. A method for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of
10 counterparties in a second role, and, the method comprising:

a. obtaining from each of the parties in the first class and storing in a first digital storage medium responses to a first set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

15 b. obtaining from each of the counterparties in the second class and storing in a second digital storage medium responses to a second set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

c. deriving, in a first computer process, from the responses of each such
20 party a first preference profile for each such party;

d. deriving, in a second computer process, from the responses of each such counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty;

e. for each party, analyzing, in a third computer process, the preference profile of such party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to
25 derive a first list of counterparties providing a relatively close fit of such party's preferences with those of counterparties on the list and communicating the list to such party.

2. A method according to claim 1, further comprising;

for each counterparty, analyzing, in a fourth digital process, the preference profile
30 of such counterparty in relation to the preference profiles of the parties to derive a

5 second list of parties providing a relatively close fit of such counterparty's preferences with those of parties on the list and communicating the second list to such counterparty.

3. A method according to claim 1, wherein the list is ranked according to the closeness of fit.

10 4. A method according to claim 2, wherein the list is ranked according to the closeness of fit.

5. A method according to claim 1, wherein obtaining responses from each of the parties is accomplished using communication over a global communication network.

15 6. A method according to claim 1, wherein obtaining responses from each of the counterparties is accomplished using communication over a global communication network.

20 7. A method according to claim 5, wherein obtaining responses from each of the parties includes making a first set of web pages available to each of the parties, via a server, the first set of such pages providing the first set of questions and permitting entry by such party of responses thereto.

25 8. A method according to claim 6, wherein obtaining responses from each of the counterparties includes making a second set of web pages available to each of the counterparties, via a server, the second set of such pages providing the second set of questions and permitting entry by such counterparty of responses thereto.

9. A method according to claim 1, wherein a substantial number of the first set of questions elicits, with respect to each level of each of a first series of attributes, revelation of a utility value which indicates the value that the party places on the level of the attribute.

5 10. A method according to claim 9, wherein a second substantial number of the second set of questions elicits, with respect to each level of each of a second series of attributes that complements the first series of attributes, revelation of a utility value which indicates the value that the counterparty places on the level of the attribute.

10 11. A method according to claim 10, wherein the process of analyzing the preference profile of the party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties is performed using a measure of distance between a set of utility values created with respect to the first series of attributes and a set of utility values created for the second series of attributes.

15 12. A method according to claim 9, wherein each of the first set of questions requires the party to rank each of a non-null set of items from among a plurality of possible ranks.

13. A method according to claim 12, wherein each of the second set of questions requires the counterparty to rank each of a non-null set of items from among a plurality of possible ranks.

20 14. A method according to claim 9, wherein the substantial number of the first set of questions elicits revelation of the utility values without asking for the values explicitly.

15. A method according to claim 10, wherein the second substantial number of the second set of questions elicits revelation of the utility values without asking for the values explicitly.

25 16. A method according to claim 1, wherein the preference profile of each party associates, with each level of each of a first series of attributes, a utility value to indicate the value which the party places on the level of the attribute.

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- 5 17. A method according to claim 16, wherein the preference profile of each
counterparty associates, with each level of each of a second series of attributes that
complements the first series of attributes, a utility value to indicate the value which
the party places on each level of the attribute.
- 10 18. A method for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement or
delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a potential financial
transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, in each context involving a member
of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of
counterparties in a second role, the method comprising:
- 15 a. obtaining from each member of a non-null set of party co-evaluators,
each party co-evaluator being associated with at least one party in the first class,
and storing in a first digital storage medium such party co-evaluator's responses to
a first set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to
estimate the closeness of such associated party's fit with a counterparty in such
context;
- 20 b. obtaining from each member of a non-null set of counterparty co-
evaluators, each counterparty co-evaluator being associated with at least one
counterparty in the second class, and storing in a second digital storage medium
such counterparty co-evaluator's responses to a second set of questions eliciting
revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such
25 associated counterparty's fit with a party in such context;
- c. deriving for each party, in a first computer process, a separate first
preference profile, based on the responses of the party and on the responses of each
co-evaluator associated with the party, if any;

5 d. deriving for each counterparty, in a second computer process, a separate second preference profile, based on the responses of the counterparty and on the responses of each co-evaluator associated with the counterparty, if any;

e. for each party, analyzing, in a third computer process, the second preference profile corresponding to each counterparty in relation to the first preference profile corresponding to the party, to derive a first list of counterparties providing a relatively close fit of such party's preferences with those of counterparties on the first list and communicating the first list to such party.

15 19. A method according to claim 18, wherein each party co-evaluator is one of: (i) the party, (ii) a member of a group to which the party belongs, wherein the group is relevant to such context, (iii) a parent or guardian of the party, (iv) an advisor to the party, (iv) a relative of the party, and (v) a friend of the party.

20 20. A method according to claim 18, wherein each counterparty co-evaluator is one of: (i) the counterparty, (ii) a member of a group to which the counterparty belongs, wherein the group is relevant to such context, (iii) a parent or guardian of the counterparty, (iv) an advisor to the counterparty, (iv) a relative of the counterparty, and (v) a friend of the counterparty.

25 21. A method according to claim 18, further comprising:
for each counterparty, analyzing, in a fourth computer process, the first preference profile corresponding to each party in relation to the second preference profile corresponding to the counterparty, to derive a second list of parties providing a relatively close fit of such counterparty's preferences with those of parties on the second list and communicating the second list to such counterparty.

30 22. An apparatus for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of

- 5 a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the apparatus comprising:
- a. a first computer process, in communication with a first digital storage medium, for obtaining from each of the parties in the first class and storing in the first digital storage medium responses to a first set of questions eliciting revelation
 - 10 of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;
 - b. a second computer process, in communication with a second digital storage medium, for obtaining from each of the counterparties in the second class and storing in the second digital storage medium responses to a second set of
 - 15 questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party such context;
 - c. a third computer process for deriving from the responses of each such party a first preference profile for each such party;
 - d. a fourth computer process for deriving from the responses of each such
 - 20 counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty; and
 - e. a fifth computer process for analyzing the preference profile of each party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a list of counterparties providing a relatively close fit of such party's preferences with those of counterparties on the list, and communicating the list to such party.
- 25 23. An apparatus for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services in at least one of (i) a potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the apparatus comprising:

5 a. a first question and response module, in communication with a first digital storage medium, for obtaining from each of the parties in the first class and storing in the first digital storage medium responses to a first set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

10 b. a second question and response module, in communication with a second digital storage medium, for obtaining from each of the counterparties in the second class and storing in the second digital storage medium responses to a second set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

15 c. a first profile processor for deriving from the responses of each such party a first preference profile for each such party;

d. a second profile processor for deriving from the responses of each such counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty; and

20 e. a closeness-of-fit analyzer for analyzing the preference profile of each party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a list of counterparties providing a relatively close fit of such party's preferences with those of counterparties on the list, and communicating the list to such party.

24. An apparatus for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services in at least one of (i) a potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the apparatus comprising:

25 a. a first question and response module, in communication with a first digital storage medium, for obtaining from each member of a non-null set of party co-evaluators, each party co-evaluator being associated with at least one party in

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5 involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the method comprising:

a. obtaining from each of the parties in the first class and storing in a first data record in a first digital storage medium responses to a first set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

b. obtaining from each of the counterparties in the second class and storing in a second data record in a second digital storage medium responses to a second set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

c. deriving, in a first computer process, from the responses of each such party a first preference profile for each such party, and storing the first preference profile in a third data record in a third digital storage medium;

d. deriving, in a second computer process, from the responses of each such counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty, and storing the second preference profile in a fourth data record in a fourth digital storage medium;

e. for each party, analyzing, in a third computer process, the preference profile of such party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a first list of counterparties providing a relatively close fit of such party's preferences with those of counterparties on the list and storing the list in a fifth data record in a fifth digital storage medium.

26. A method according to claim 25, wherein a substantial number of the first set of questions elicits, with respect to each level of each of a first series of attributes, revelation of a utility value which indicates the value that the party

5 places on the level of the attribute, and wherein a set of utility values so created is stored in the third data record.

27. A method according to claim 26, wherein a second substantial number of the second set of questions elicits, with respect to each level of each of a second series of attributes that complements the first series of attributes, revelation of a utility value which indicates the value that the counterparty places on the level of the attribute, and wherein a set of utility values so created is stored in the fourth data record.

28. A method according to claim 27, wherein the process of analyzing the preference profile of the party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties is performed using a measure of distance between the set of utility values stored in the third data record and the set of utility values stored in the fourth data record.

29. An apparatus for structuring a database, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the apparatus comprising:

a. a first question and response module, in communication with a first digital storage medium, for obtaining from each of the parties in the first class and storing in a first data record in the first digital storage medium responses to a first set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

b. a second question and response module, in communication with a second digital storage medium, for obtaining from each of the counterparties in the second class and storing in a second data record in the second digital storage

5 medium responses to a second set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

c. a first profile processor for deriving from the responses of each such party a first preference profile for each such party, and storing the first preference
10 profile in a third data record in a third digital storage medium;

d. a second profile processor for deriving from the responses of each such counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty, and storing the second preference profile in a fourth data record in a fourth digital storage medium; and

15 e. a closeness-of-fit analyzer for analyzing the preference profile of each party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a list of counterparties providing a relatively close fit of such party's preferences with those of counterparties on the list, and storing the list in a fifth data record in a fifth digital storage medium.